

Amerikan Prisons

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Amerikan Prisons are Government-Sponsored Torture—an Address

Most people don't quite relate U.S. prisons to government-sponsored torture. We can thank the mainstream corporate media and politicians for this. Since the 1960's and 1970's, they've persistently projected the false image of U.S. prisons to the public as resorts where dangerous criminals eat chips, lift weights, and watch videos all day, much like the false images given of slavery as an experience that Black folks actually enjoyed. These false images are sustainable because the real world of prisons is a hidden one, concealed behind walls and razor wire, inaccessible to the public.

There's also a connection between prison and slavery. The plantation system actually merged with the penitentiary system after the Civil War, and the torture and savagery, especially beatings, remained a mainstay. In fact, at the end of the Civil War, slavery was for the first time authorized by the U.S. Constitution in the 13th Amendment, which authorized the government to treat convicts as slaves. So the newly "freed" Blacks were simply targeted with criminal prosecutions and then placed right back into bondage to serve as construct laborers, on chain gangs, on prison plantations, etc. Today, in a mad rush to find cheap labor, corporate Amerika looks to prisons as a source of free labor pools. But let's look at torture.

Brutality and torture are the common feature of U.S. prisons. Nothing coming out of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib has matched the images that showed the savage torture of prisoners following the Attica uprising in 1971. And what about California's Corcoran State Prison where guards set up fights between prisoners, gambled on the outcomes, and then shot the prisoners for fighting? Some 43 were shot and 8 killed just between 1989 and 1994. Others were shot and killed with no justification. These are documented situations.

As during slavery, sexual abuse by officials in U.S. prisons is prevalent. There has long been a nationwide scandal surrounding women prisoners being raped by male guards. Then there's the sexual humiliation attendant to abusive strip searches, which are often accompanied by degrading verbal abuse. This all exacerbated by complete denial of voluntary heterosexual relations. And there's a genocidal component to this and the vast targeting of virile-aged youth of color for lengthy imprisonment where they cease to be able to reproduce, and in an environment where HIV, AIDS, and hepatitis abound.

Government Sponsored
Torture
~ Rashid



WE MUST FIGHT FOR OUR CHILDRENS' FUTURE!

"Don't be surprised when I say I was in prison. We've all been in prison. That's what America means - prison!" ~ Malcolm X

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practices go up to the highest levels of command. This has proven to be the case in the scandal surrounding tortures at Abu Ghraib, with those soldiers targeted for prosecution who were reckless enough to allow practices of torture to come out. As Scott Horton of the N.Y. Bar Association found after interviewing U.S. soldiers involved in the scandal, "the highest profile cases in which the severest sanctions are sought consistently involve those soldiers who...permitted photographic evidence of the crimes at Abu Ghraib to become public knowledge." As Horton concluded, "it wasn't the abuse of prisoners that was being punished, but the fact that the military, and particularly [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld, has been embarrassed by these matters becoming public." This is the reality across the political spectrum, and no less than in U.S. prisons.

There is need for us to move collectively against this reality of routine torture specifically and the slave status of U.S. prisoners in general. The alternative is to sit in relative isolation, each of us, and permit the outrages to continue and increase, which *they will*, until no one will be left unaffected. 95% of those imprisoned in Amerika will return to society at some point, and most of them in a more damaged state than when they came to prison. It's likely that some of them will be living near or with you.

There's a movement underway to Amend the 13th Amendment to Abolish Slavery in All its Forms! The New Afrikan Black Panther Party, Prison Chapter, supports this movement. We also promote Transforming the Iron Houses of Oppression into Schools of Liberation. We ask that you join us in these efforts. A Rally is being organized to take place along with a conference in Philadelphia in 2007. The conference will focus on 1) reaching out broadly to prisoner rights groups and drawing them together into a national association with abolishing the status of / for prisoners as its cornerstone, and 2) reaching out broadly to the Black and other oppressed people in the Philadelphia area and getting them to build for and attend this conference. The rally following the conference in the streets of Philly will raise the demands of 1) Abolish Slavery—Amend the 13th Amendment, 2) Amnesty and Freedom for Political Prisoners/POW's, 3) End the Racist Death Penalty, 4) Defend the Human Rights of all Prisoners.

For information of this Conference and Rally, or to contact the NABPP-PC, contact Rising Sun Press, P.O. Box 4362, Allentown, PA. 18105, phone (610) – 437 - 2971 or email tomw@iwon.com.

Only if we Dare to Struggle do we Dare to Win! Ending torture compels that All Power be in the hands of the People!

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strip searches accompanied by demeaning and provocative remarks, etc. 6

While seemingly benign, this combination of psychological techniques has proven revolutionary in its consistency in crushing prisoners' wills, esteem and value systems, and driving them into acute psychosis. I have personally witnessed this result in those confined in the supermax prisons with me. The rate of attempted and successful suicides is unprecedented compared with "normal" prison environments. I've witnessed four attempts in my own 22-bed unit in less than two months—two in one night.

Most of those who've endured supermax confinement for a year or more I've observed suffer a distinct regression into paranoia, irrationality, grandiose and persecutory delusions, childish attention-seeking behavior, reduced impulse control, hyper-sexuality, reduced ability to concentrate or maintain organized thoughts, compulsive and irrational searches for stimulation, gratification and attention, etc. Many decline to eat and smear feces on themselves and their cells, rambling to themselves, screaming and ranting day and night, throwing feces on others (especially on other prisoners under guard encouragements), etc. All are simply left untreated except for being prescribed antipsychotic drugs, which further damage the brain and have dangerous side-effects, which many don't take. All are treated by guards with violence, abuse, and disciplinary measure, often being left property-less indefinitely inside empty cells—further sensory deprivation.

So what's occurring in these prisons is treatments of U.S. prisoners in ways developed for use against so-called "enemy combatants" whom the U.S. government admits have no political rights in its eyes.

Not only do I witness these methods and their sobering and heartrending effects on the humyn psyche, but I have been and am a victim of them. My only advantage, I believe, is in knowing and understanding the methods, being conscious to counter their effects, and having a strong constitution. Indeed, only a few reeks ago, in response to my work in exposing the brutalities at this prison and refusing to back down in other political work I've been involved in with outside people, I was twice electrocuted with a 50,000-volt electric stun belt by guards.

During and since World War II U.S. officials have learned that torture is best carried out in the dark and in ways that avoid proof and attention. The norm is therefore to deny the practice publicly, to couch it in seemingly harmless forms, but to continue to plumb it of all its benefits in hidden and veiled practice. Its victims are the poor and homeless. That's me, and potentially you.

Torture is an official part of U.S. foreign and domestic policy under its federal and state executive powers. It's simply politically incorrect to allow this fact to be exposed to the public. When abuses and torture come out, damage control has blame placed on low-level officials as "renegade" and "rogue" soldiers or police or prison guards, whereas clearance for these

But there's a higher grade of torture. After World War II, western governments established an aversion to physical torture, which they embodied in the charter and treaties of their newly established United Nations. This was brought on by the outrages of Nazi Germany tortures and humyn experiments against its own white citizens: Jews, Slavs, Poles, Gypsies, disableds, dissidents, etc. On account of this the newly established CIA became very interested in developed less physically evident methods of mentally breaking and brainwashing enemies. As a result the CIA and Defense Department funded several studies with independent, Harvard University, National Institute of Mental Health, and other psychiatrists and psychologists.

These studies led to breakthrough developments in the art of torture that focused primarily on psychological methods and produced revolutionary results with a consistency never seen before under physical torture. What the CIA learned was that stated of mental disorder, collapse, capitulation, and psychosis could be produced in a victim by use of seemingly benign and harmless methods. Namely, sensory deprivation and "self-inflicted pain" coupled with attacks on cultural sensitivities and personal phobias.

Sensory deprivation alone proved effective against and tortuously traumatic to its victims. As one CIA researcher in Canada, Dr. Donald Hebb, discovered, "the effect of isolation on the brain function of the prisoner is much like that which occurs if he is beaten, starved, or deprived of sleep." He found that normal brain function is severely impaired if a person is deprived of the complex sensory stimulation of normal social environments. In fact, the CIA's Harvard psychiatrists found that "sensory deprivation can produce major mental and behavioral changes in man" and produces psychosis more naturally and consistently than drugs and physical torture. The equally effective opposite extreme of sensory deprivation is sensory overload, where the victim is bombarded with loud noises, bright light, noxious odors, etc.

The CIA embodied the findings of these and other studies in its 1963 torture manual "Kubork Counterintelligence Interrogation" where it confirmed that:

1. The deprivation of sensory stimuli induces stress;
2. the stress becomes unbearable to most subjects;
3. the subject has a growing need for physical and social stimuli, and
4. some subjects progressively lose touch with reality, focus inwardly, and produce delusions, hallucinations, and other pathological effects.

The second feature of mental torture the CIA developed was "self-inflicted pain", where the victim is caused to remain in physically and/or mentally painful positions and conditions (called "stress positions"), which he is told will end upon his cooperation with his captors. This causes the victim to feel he is the cause of his own pain, thus making him the master of his own fate. So long as he resists he will suffer, but as soon as he cooperates his suffering will instantly stop.

The last two methods which were later developed target the victims cultural sensitivities and personal phobias. Such as the practice of destroying, degrading, or flushing a Muslim detainee's Qu'ran, forcing him to commit acts that violate his religion like engaging in or simulating homosexual acts, masturbating in front of "strange" wimyn, also exposing him to things he fears, like dogs, etc.

These four techniques were apparent in the photographic images coming out of U.S. military prisons at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. Prisoners hooded, goggled, ear-muffed, and gloved to shut out sensory stimulation; attacks on senses such as with loud noises and music; forced to remain in painful positions (kneeling and standing at length, forced to keep arms outstretched, etc.) Those who saw some of the images of these combined techniques saw nothing alarming because there was no evidence of physically damaging brutality. However, all who have made expert analyses comparing mental and physical torture have unanimously found psychological torture the worse of the two, because it causes more severe mental damage, is hard to prove, and its effects last longer.

But what many who saw those images coming out of the U.S. military's prisons also did not recognize was they were seeing a stark reflection of conditions and practices occurring everyday inside prisons across Amerika.

The Amerikan reformers who first devised the penitentiary believed that criminals could be "reformed" through solitary confinement, labor, and deprivation began at Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary in the 1820's, but what was actually discovered was that conditions of sensory deprivation in isolation caused mental deterioration and psychosis. Leading writers like Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin, upon touring the penitentiary, spoke out against its conditions of mental torture. As Dickens observed, "I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body." The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ruled such solitary confinement mentally destructive and outlawed it. However, the practice along with physical brutality persisted inside the hidden confines of U.S. prisons.

The brutalities of the U.S. prison system became public knowledge in the 1960's and 1970's as a result of the activism and literature of a broad prison movement and eloquent writings like those of George L. Jackson, Field Marshall of the Black Panther Party. Prisoners' views were being widely published, and the Attica uprising sparked by inhumane and oppressive prison conditions and the assassination of Jackson by prison guards exposed in shocking images the oppression brutalities of U.S. prisons.

The official response was to suppress prisoner literature, eliminate or restrict college and writing courses, to outlaw prisoners' profiting from their writings, and eliminating prisoner-oriented media. This effectively de-politicized prisoners and allowed officials and the mainstream media to

wage a racist campaign to demonize prisoners' image and isolate us to eliminate public awareness and support. Meantime, measures were taken to kill the revolutionary activist spirit in prisons, to remove and isolate the politically conscious and advanced prisoners, and incite the remainder into internal violence and division. Only months after Attica officials opened the first control unit in the U.S. prison at Marion, Illinois, within which torture became institutionalized with clear political objectives.

As former Marion warden Ralph Arons stated in federal court: "The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in society at large." (Note his emphasis on mere thoughts of fundamental change and actions, and not only inside the prisons but also society at large). But U.S. leaders deny political imprisonments or persecution of political dissenters or opponents. Since Marion opened its control unit in 1972, control units and supermaxes have swept the country, with most located in isolated rural white communities far removed from prisoners' loved ones and sympathetic communities. In these high security environments torture of prisoners along the lines of the CIA model is a common feature.

All U.S. supermaxes and control units practice sensory deprivation—isolation and solitary confinement 23½ hours per day in cells the size of a bathroom, minimal human interaction, little to no change in scenery, limited property access, minimal contact with family and friends, etc. Sensory shock and overload is also inflicted in such prisoners being housed next to or near others with mental disorders or whom guards incite that scream, rant, bang, flood, throw body waste, don't bathe, etc. "Self-inflicted pain" is also a common practice in control units. Prisoners are routinely shackled and handcuffed or restrained to cell bunks in cramped and uncomfortable positions without meals and left to urinate and defecate on themselves and lie in it for hours to days; they're left hours to days in bare cold cells with little to no clothing; subjected to destroyed or denied property and meals and privileges like outside exercise and showers; or forced to remain in high control confinement until they decide to cooperate with officials, cease a pattern of disagreeable conduct, abandon or snitch on political or gang affiliations, etc. (Many simply remain in these units, indefinitely out of official spite, for no reason at all, or for being inclined to complain or litigate against or publicly expose abusive treatments and conditions.) They are made to feel that their discomfort is their own fault for failing to cooperate and will cease upon their finally giving in.

Attacks on prisoners' cultural sensitivities and personal phobias is the norm also, especially in that most of the control unit and supermax prisons are located in remote rural white populated areas, whereas the prisoners are primarily urban people of color. This racial and cultural divide itself generates official insensitivity and intolerance to the prisoners' cultural interests, and causes prisoners to suffer acute cultural shock. Male prisoners' senses of masculinity are routinely targeted with homosexually suggestive